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ABSTRACT

The educational reform movement, rural economy, and demographics of rural areas of the United States require, if not mandate, that partnerships be forged in education among and between people in rural areas, urban and suburban areas, states, and the nation to provide quality education for students who will become the leaders of tomorrow. Through task forces, which in most states had rural representation, the number of courses offered to all secondary students and requirements for graduation has increased. Sound educational content must be derived from district goals and expectations, based upon agreement of administrators, teachers, parents, and the community considering state and federal parameters. Local support of education must view education not only in terms of cost but investment. Rural teachers must be recruited and retained and welcomed into the fabric of community life. Demographics should be used to forecast educational needs and outcomes and to reinforce cooperative efforts. Coalitions formed to address these issues can spread the story of rural education and the role it plays in the pursuit of excellence in education. (NEC)

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A RURAL SCHOOL SCOREBOARD

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Paper presented at the National Rural Education Association Conference (October 12-15, 1985, Cedar Rapids, IA).

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A RURAL SCHOOL SCOREBOARD

Over three years ago, the speaker said, "Education in rural schools is alive, enterprising and working to provide quality education through different organizational configurations, and experiencing many changes as it strives to meet the needs of all children living in rural areas for a quality education." In the interim there have been collaborative efforts within and among schools and districts. The scoreboard has been flashing with innovative and creative plans, activities and cooperative practices that indicate schools in rural areas have examined their resources and found to a surprising degree the means both in human and financial capital to assure opportunities for their students which will prepare them for a world of changing complexity. One which may take them into a higher density domain.

But within the last twenty months or so, other factors, particularly in more agricultural-dependent regions, have intruded upon the progress that have made it difficult to continue at least at an accelerated rate. One, of course has been the reform movement as directed and/or interpreted by governor's, state legislators and state departments of education. A second, is the present state of the farm economy - high costs, over-production with lower prices and fewer market possibilities, plummeting land values, and in some cases over-extension. Yet I know folks in rural areas are in businesses of high risk, who have always taken an optimistic outlook in taking those risks. A third, is demography. A declining rural population, a decreasing

number of farms while there is an increasing acreage per farm, and with more absentee landlords. These factors will be discussed later in more detail and with suggestions for maintaining high scores on the board.

No one questions the inclusion of rural students who must have equity of educational opportunity and who must have equal access to that opportunity. A paramount need for rural areas is to be heard collectively through an organization. Minnesota has formed a Rural Education Association and it is my understanding that Oklahoma is interested in forming an organization also. One voice or a concensus of representatives of parents, educators, business and industry, agricultural organizations, the professions can if everyone works together, speak with some unity.

The elements of leadership, research, unified voice, and service are indicators of commitment to action.

Partnerships should not be a new idea in rural areas for a great strength has always been our concern for one another. Rural America has generally typified community working relationships - cooperatives and cooperative extension, for instance. A strong sense of community has always been present.

However, just recognizing and implementing partnerships will not provide a panacea in furnishing solutions to every concern or provide for 'one best' way' to address those concerns. Nevertheless, the power of association partnerships within and without the educational enterprise, is in the ability to alter or

modify existing practices as social and economic realities merge. As a former state commissioner of education commented several years ago, "If a state is to meet its responsibilities for the education of all children, and if local control is to be strengthened and remain meaningful, then we must develop the kinds of collaborative arrangements for both planning and operations that are politically and popularly acceptable, financially feasible, and educationally sound."

It is the effort of people who are assembled here, working at the grass-roots level that will kindle the fires of citizenship and of quality education in the interest of the general welfare. All of us are citizens of this country. Partnerships not confrontations are the stabilizers needed in society, and particularly in education. Time and effort must be given to finding solutions to problems not assessing blame for them.

Keep communication lines open so that the rural student can have every opportunity to prepare for a service economy in an information and technological society on a quality basis. A recent newspaper story in Nebraska pointed out what one small rural district was doing to prepare its students for the future. Though many of them would prefer to return to rural areas, they know their futures lay in places where job and job mobility were available.

Newcastle, Nebraska with and enrollment around 135 in high school noted a change in career planning as a result of the

ailing farm economy. One senior remarked, "Everybody is thinking more than ever about what they're going to do when they get out of high school." Rural schools are meeting the changing needs of their students by offering more college-preparatory courses as enrollment in agricultural coursed decline. (Omaha World-Herald, 9/16/85, pp.5 & 7).

Let me now turn to factors that must be taken into consideration as rural educators and supporters plan their program and procedures for the short-term and the long-term future.

Every state has approached the educational reform movement in a manner unique to that state. Through task forces which in most states had rural representation, either the Legislature or the State Board of Education increased the number of courses districts must offer secondary students for the 1985-86 school year. Learner outcomes or local rigorous student goals needed to be developed.

Probably, graduation requirements have been increased - the range over the country is 20 to 24 units with the general requirements being, 4 years of English, 2 years of laboratory science, 2 years mathematics above general math, 3 years of social studies, including American History, Government and in many states a semester of economics, 1 1/2 years of physical education, 1 years of fine arts, 2 years of foreign language or vocational education, leaving the remainder for electives. Of course, there are variations on the scenario. Testing on a

statewide basis is or will be in effect. Though the school year or school day appears not to have been legislated, and in some states it is, use of time in the present school day is being pushed. Consideration of an extension for summer programs for those students having difficulty meeting either promotion or graduation requirements, and additional tutoring during the school year is in place or being discussed.

Content is still a key area for attention, not just the courses offered but what is taught in them, Bill Honig, the State Superintendent in California, recommended to the State Board of Education that 20 science textbooks be rejected for watering down their teaching on evolution. "It's not just science books," Honig said, "It's history and literature." California buys 11% of the nation's textbooks; it's the one market bigger than Texas. Textbooks will be upgraded, but it will take time to accomplish the task. Therefore, additional time to develop supplemental materials and teacher "ownership" will be needed.

The information explosion makes it increasingly difficult to decide course content, how much, how much depth. Local boards, administrators, parents, teachers and the community must agree in so far as possible on what the instructional goals for their students will be in light of state and federal parameters - guidelines.

On the basis of district goals and expectations <u>content</u> is derived. It is important that teachers be involved in developing curriculum, it is they who will teach, manage and coach in the

learning process - the involvement takes time, and certainly, we all should know that the best time for development of curriculum is not after a full day of teaching!

Consequently, summer programs for students, for curriculum development and for staff development are of significant value in planning and funding.

Yes, the move toward centralization of policy at the state level makes it more and more critical for local partnerships to be formed.

Another consideration in planning for content is for an articulated curriculum-not only in K-12, but the "connections" as Bud Hodgkinson calls it in his new publication, ALL ONE SYSTEM, from nursery schools to post-graduate institutions. "People working in these institutions have virtually no connection," he says, "with all the others and little awareness of educational activity provided by the total." We do, however, have to do our part being cognizant of the entire spectrum. For instance, it might be useful to have high school teachers join with elementary/junior high/middle school staff in preparing the scope and sequence chart of subject content. Likewise, cross-disciplinary planning which includes vocational education is not only helpful but necessary.

The report card for reform does not mean "settling in" or "status quo", it means change, refinement, revision, improvement. Working together, it can be accomplished and the grade moved from a C to a B to an A. Change reminds me of a conversation between

a high school youth and a retired farmer who had moved into a small town where the youth attended high school - "Uncle Joe", said the youth, "I'll bet you have seen a lot of changes in farming practices and this community over the years." "Well, son, yes I have," replied the old farmer, "and I've been agin' most of them." Time marches on and so society changes.

These are difficult times economically and under such circumstances attention is turned to international competition in trade, and the levels of achievement in that competition, as well as the across-the-board impact on the various sectors of the economy. I do not have to tell you the effect on the farm economy and from it to the business and industry sectors reliant upon it.

What has the foregoing to do with the report card for rural education and its quality?

FIRST, we are inclined to view education in terms of cost, not an investment - and most of us in this room in the near or not-too-distant future will need to rely on the accomplishments, the work, the earnings of the generation now in our elementary/secondary schools. We cannot afford less than best!

What will it take - just as farm machinery, chemicals, seed and other hard goods have increased in price, so it is with education.

What grade will be given to the rural sector in this regard? The grade will range from poor to very good depending upon the community's belief in the importance of education.

SECOND, studies in many states have shown that teachers have

been paid less, have higher turnover, taken part in less staff development in rural areas. In addition, in the community sense, teachers have been treated as outsiders socially, left to their own devices for recreational options and often asked to volunteer for providing services that impinge upon preparation for teaching and relaxation. If this is affirmed in your rural area, in spite of the rural economy, the problem needs to be addressed innovatively and creatively. Your community, your association can study the issues contained therein, and through sharing, partnerships as well as other means find solutions in order to recruit and retain good teachers and provide for their continued development. The real key to quality education is the relationship between teacher and student. What score will you post on the scoreboard for "your" district?

ANOTHER FACTOR, that has made us face reality in rural areas has been that of demography. If the baby boom was a powerful wind at the back of pro-school forces in the 1950's and 1960's, so the end of the baby-boom was a depressant in the 1970's and early 1980's. We all know, too, the general aging of the population has increased substantially so that there are a large number of citizens who have no immediate stake in the condition of schooling. The fastest growing segment of the population according to 1982 census data are those persons over 85 years of age. In non-metropolitan areas the increase is even greater.

By using demographics of known quantities - those who are born now-we know the nature of those coming into first grade, and

we can forecast with some precision what the cohort of graduating high school seniors will be like twelve years later. Demographers tell us now that by 1992, only three workers will provide the funds for each retiree and one of the three workers will be a minority. Also, unless as mentioned before, we make special efforts to provide a support system for academic progress, dropout and pushout number will increase. High school dropout have a rather typical profile. They are usually from low-income or poverty setting, often from a minority group background (although not often Asian-American), have very low basic academic skills, especially reading and math, have parents who are not high school graduates and who are generally uninterested in the child's progress in school. Hispanics will become the largest minority by 1990, 25%. Your say this isn't true in certain regions of the country, that's so, but the effect of changes in population groupings will impact us all.

Even though in some regions there is an echo-boom starting through the schools, the number of young children will not substantially increase. In agricultural zones with larger farmsteads, fewer farms and a smaller farm population, the necessity of banding together as you have been doing is vitally important.

Not only is it true for educational purposes, but for social and economic purposes as well. Partnerships are an essential part of agricultural economics, business and industrial economics in rural and urban areas. We have not done as good a job

of linking together those parts of the system as should have. Hence, public policy regarding rural education has tended to ignore or neglect the reality of paying attention to rural schooling with some serious consequences. Accordingly, rural education associations should expect to venture into these kinds of relationships in order to tell the story of the uniquenesses and the necessity of quality education if the rural sector of the economy is to flourish. On the rural school scoreboard this one will be pass or fail.

Several years ago a policy analyst in the U.S. Department of Education pointed out that policy-makers regard sparsity, isolation, smallness and limited economic base - conditions of rural schools in negative terms re grants, funding formulas, and special problems., but rural and small school advocates must not be intimidated because of demographic factors.

Perhaps the unclear and sketchy message in this address is that the reform movement, the rural economy and the demographics of rural America require, if not mandate, that partnerships must be forged in education among and between people in rural areas, urban and suburban areas, states, the nation and yes, internationally. Coalitions formed can spread the story of rural education, we need all of the help we can get if rural schools are to succeed.

The consequences of such action is to provide quality education for students who will become the leaders of tomorrow, and who in turn make their communities, state, nation and the

world a better place to live.

An old gardener while laying a stone wall on a country estate was asked by the owner why he used so many small stones along with the larger ones. "It's like this," the gardener said, "these stones are like men. Many small men like me are needed to keep the big ones in place. If I leave small stones out, the big ones will not stay in place and the wall will fall."

Is it not so with rural schools, if they are left out of our planning for the pursuit of excellence in education, the educational system as a whole will fall.

Together, as you are doing, we will maintain our faith in education as an indispensable asset for a free people - all of them. Victory will then be flashed on the scoreboard for rural and all education.